

The Devil and Tom Walker

By Washington Irving

Setting of the Story

- A few miles from Boston, Massachusetts – inlet that ends in a thickly wooded swamp
- Legend has it that “Kidd the Pirate” buried a large amount of treasure in this area, and that the devil presided at the hiding of the money.
- Unfortunately, Kidd never came back to get his treasure because he was captured, sent back to England, and hung.

Tom Walker, his wife, his house, and his horse

- Tom and his wife were an extremely stingy (“miserly”) couple – so stingy that they often tried to cheat each other.
- His wife was “termagant”, temperamental, loud, and strong – she did not just argue with her husband verbally; they often got into physically fights.
- They had a sad “forlorn” looking house that almost seemed as though it were starving – no one ever came to visit.
- Their miserable horse was so skinny one could see its ribs; it was not fed properly, and it was pitiful to look at.

Meeting up with the Devil

- Tom decides to rest at an Old Indian fort late in the evening – a place where savages once held incantations and made sacrifices to evil spirits.
- Tom meets the Devil – whom Tom knows as “Old Scratch”. Not quite black, nor Indian, Old Scratch’s face is covered in dirt and soot as though he has been working among fires (hell). He has a pair of great red eyes.
- Old Scratch’s most noticeable feature is his shock of coarse black hair – stands out from his head in all directions.

Tom's short cut through the woods

- Was not a good choice – it became an ill chosen route
- Swamp was thickly grown, lots of trees, very dark, full of pits and quagmires (land that sinks under foot), smothering mud, dark and “stagnant” pools.
- There was no really solid footing for Tom, and his short cut ended up being quite “precarious”

Talking with Old Scratch

- Tom noticed that many of the trees had the name of some great man from the colony on it – most of them had been chopped down. (people who presumably had made a deal with the Devil)
- Tom was not afraid of the Devil because he was no scarier than living with his wife, and so the Devil told Tom that he had control over Kidd the Pirate's treasure.
- The Devil offered to make a deal with Tom – with certain conditions, but Tom said he had to think about it.
- The Devil's Signature – black finger print burned onto Tom's forehead

Tom's "termagant" wife

- Tom discussed the potential deal with his wife, but he ultimately decided not to take it just because she wanted him to. He chose not to make the deal to spite her.
- She tried to make her own deal with Old Scratch but was not successful: first time he said no and for her to come back with something to offer him, and the second time she went, she never came back.
- No one knows for sure what happened to her – perhaps she got lost in the swamp or that she left Tom....
- But, when Tom went looking for her, he found her apron hanging in the branches of a tree with a heart and liver in it. Tom's wife tried to deal with the Devil – ended in a massive fight – Tom believes that his wife put up a very good fight as indicated by the chunks of Old Scratch's hair that were on the ground.

Tom's deal with the Devil

- Tom was not very upset about losing his wife; in fact, he was grateful to Old Scratch for taking care of her. As a result, he wanted to discuss making a deal.
- “One condition that need not be mentioned...” Tom had to sell his soul in order to get what he wants.
- Tom absolutely refused to become a slave trader because it went against his conscience.
- Instead, with the money and help of the Devil, Tom became a very successful “usurer” – counting house, money lender, dealt with mortgages.

As Tom Walker got older

- Tom became very successful, but as he grew older, he became more anxious about the deal he made with the Devil.
- He became a violent church goer, prayed loudly, carried a small bible in his coat pocket, and had a larger bible on his desk at work.
- He even had his horse saddled and buried feet up – because Tom believed that on the last day of the world, the world would be turned upside down, and this way his horse would be ready for a quick getaway.

The Demise of Tom Walker

- Tom was dealing with a poor land owner who was asking for more time to pay on his bill. The man begged for more time saying that his family would be ruined and that Tom had already made so much money off of him.
- Tom said that the Devil could take him (Tom) if that statement was true - that Tom had made money off of this poor man. And, so the Devil came to take him.
- All of Tom's assets were reduced to nothing – money/coins became chips and shavings, mortgages were nothing but ashes, only found the skeletons of his horses, and his house burned to the ground.

Elements of Romanticism

- Romantic tale of the common man – strong emphasis on strong morals (good vs. evil)
- Legend/Folklore/Supernatural elements – use of imagination
- Making a deal with the Devil – the nature of greed is a major theme – what is your price?
- Swamp/Wooded area of nature – the place where Tom and his wife must confront the nature of their own beings and moral make-up